

Britain, Battle of

1940-1941

The Battle of Britain was the air war (1940-41) fought over Great Britain between the German Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force during WORLD WAR II. Having decided (June 1940) to invade Britain, Adolf HITLER ordered a preliminary attack by the Luftwaffe to destroy the RAF and neutralize the Royal Navy. After a series of raids on British coastal defenses in July, the Luftwaffe's attack began in earnest on August 8. With a total force of 900 fighters (mostly MESSERSCHMITT BF-109s) and 1,300 bombers, the Germans mounted massive daily raids on southern England. Although the RAF had much smaller forces, about 650 HURRICANES and SPITFIRES, the newly developed RADAR enabled it to concentrate in vital areas for effective resistance.

On August 24 the Luftwaffe began attacks further inland, seeking to destroy the RAF bases and fighter production centers. By September 5 the RAF Fighter Command had lost 450 planes and was close to defeat. At that point, however, Hitler and Luftwaffe chief Herman GOERING changed their strategy. Infuriated by British bombing raids (August 24-29) on Berlin, they concentrated the German attacks on London. With its defense task simplified, the RAF inflicted heavy losses on the German bombing formations. Early in October the Luftwaffe switched entirely to night raids. By the end of that month Hitler had canceled his invasion plans.

German bombing attacks on British cities (the "Blitz") continued until May 1941, when most of the Luftwaffe planes were withdrawn to prepare for the German invasion of the USSR. The Battle of Britain, however, had been won by October 1940. Of the RAF fighter pilots, Winston CHURCHILL said: "Never, in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many to so few." In saving Britain from invasion, they had inflicted the first major defeat on Germany in the war.

Bibliography: Collier, Richard, *Eagle Day* (1966); Deighton, Len, *Fighter: The True Story of the Battle of Britain* (1978); Gelb, Norman, *Scramble: A Narrative History of the Battle of Britain* (1985); Hough, Richard, and Richards, Denis, *The Battle of Britain: The Greatest Air Battle of World War II* (1990); Mosley, L., ed., *The Battle of Britain* (1977); Taylor, Telford, *Breaking Wave* (1967); Townsend, Peter, *Duel of Eagles* (1970); Wood, Derek, and Dempster, Derek, *The Narrow Margin* (1961; repr. 1975).

Atlantic Charter

1941

The Atlantic Charter was an Anglo-American statement of common principles issued on Aug. 14, 1941, by President Franklin D. ROOSEVELT and Prime Minister Winston CHURCHILL. They had conferred for four days (August 9-12) aboard the U.S.S. Augusta off Newfoundland. Although the United States had not yet entered World War II, the statement became an unofficial manifesto of American and British aims in war and peace. The charter enunciated eight principles: (1) renunciation of territorial aggression; (2) no territorial changes without consent of the peoples concerned; (3) restoration of sovereign rights and self-government; (4) access to raw materials for all nations; (5) world economic cooperation; (6) freedom from fear and want; (7) freedom of the seas; and (8) disarmament of aggressors. The charter's principles were endorsed by 26 allies in the United Nations Declaration signed in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 1, 1942.

Louis L. Snyder

Casablanca Conference

14-23 Jan 1943

From Jan. 14 to Jan. 23, 1943, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt and British leader Winston Churchill met in Casablanca, Morocco, to settle the future strategy of the Allies in World War II. The invasion of Sicily was agreed upon, and after the meeting Roosevelt made a controversial demand for the "unconditional surrender" of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

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